The Labour Government 1945-51 (and the creation of the Welfare State)

Introduction

Labour
The Labour Party emerged as a political pressure group in the late 19th Century under leadership of Keir Hardie.
The formation of the party was the result of many years of effort by working people, trade unionists and socialists united by the goal of changing British Parliament to represent the interests of the people.

Election Success
Labour’s first major election success came in 1926 when Ramsay MacDonald became first Prime Minister.
During World War One, Labour was part of the wartime coalition – but as a junior partner.

Tackling Poverty
Before World War Two, attitudes towards poverty were not sympathetic. But World War Two did much to change the attitudes towards poverty and social class.

Coalition Government
During the War, the needs of many in the country became greater as conditions got worse due to rationing, health care and other issues. During that time people were likely to accept greater government intervention or help than they would have before. Therefore, they accepted governments ‘War socialism’. A more socialist society was one of Labour’s main aims.

Rationing had been forced upon all classes of society. Hardship and sacrifices had affected everyone. After the war there was a common consensus that society needed to change.

The arrival of evacuated children opened the eyes of many to the terrible health and poverty issues in many of the towns and cities.

Summary of improvements:
- Provision of school means and milk was extended.
- State nurseries were established.
- Immunisation was made free in 1941.
- Old age pensions are improved
- In 1944 the Education Act raised school leaving age to 15
- In 1945 The Family Allowance Act meant that child benefit was introduced.

Coalition Government
With several key Labour Ministers were members of the wartime government it must also be said that both Conservatives and Liberals contributed to the welfare state.